

Something To Hold Onto by Val_Creative

Series: [That Feeling Of \[2\]](#)

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Summary:

Over time, El grows to loathe her wrist tattoo and all of horrible associations with it. Hopper decides to play Dad and offer her some help and bonding.

Something To Hold Onto

Author's Note:

a quick warning for mentions of previous injuries/
wounds done consciously.

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Nothing compares to Eggos as her favorite food.

(That is until she tried crunchy peanut butter and strawberry jelly
gooped on plain white.)

El swallows another mouthful, opening her mouth and biting into
another large hunk.

She didn't know a sandwich could be so *sweet*.

"Take it easy, kid. You're gonna give yourself a stomachache," Hopper
warns her, glancing over his newspaper through his reading lens.

El's cheeks bulge a little.

"Dwwuu whheehha mwwoo?"

He snorts loudly, getting up from the table and opening up the sink
cabinet. "Chew first," Hopper orders, looking more and more
humored by El's antics. "Swallow, then talk."

She chews aggressively, gulping.

"Do we have more?" El asks once more, her voice becoming
frustrated. "We're out of milk too."

"I'll pick up some groceries in a little bit." Hopper gestures for El's
bandaged wrist, taking off his reading glasses and coming to the
kitchen table with the first aid kit. "You gotta let me take a look at
that, okay?"

El hesitates, gazing up into his softening, troubled expression, before dropping the rest of her sandwich on her plate.

There's more *Band-Aids* than gauze or alcohol wipes in the kit. She counts out the items mentally while Hopper clips off her dirtier, older bandage, lifting her forearm gently and unrolling the material, exposing her jagged, red wound.

She remembers trying to dig a sharpened blade underneath her darkly inked flesh, to get rid of Papa's memory and his claim on her. To be free of *Eleven* and all the horrible things associated with that tattooed number. It didn't work.

Mike yelled at her, and he was scared, and there was so much blood. **011** is still there, glaring at her.

"Really did a doozy on yourself, huh?" Hopper murmurs, dabbing an alcohol wipe on the cut. El winces silently at the immediate, twinging sensation of pain. "You gonna explain what happened or am I gonna have to guess..."

"I wanted it off," she says dully.

"So you decided, *what*—you would get knife-happy?"

The accusation in Hopper's tone doesn't go unnoticed. El tenses her jaw, but is ashamed by her impulsiveness.

"Mike stopped me."

A gruff noise.

"Kid's good for something after all," Hopper says under his breath, draping three patches of gauze over El's wound and rebandaging.

El chooses to ignore the overly scornful remark. There's something bigger on her mind. "Will said... I should get a tattoo to cover it," she speaks up, bracing herself for the response. It's more or less what she expects — Hopper lets out a bellowing, contemptuous laugh, grinning.

"No self-respecting tattoo artist is gonna tattoo a kid your age," he

informs her, eyes lowered on El's newly bandaged wrist. Hopper notices her fidgeting in place, appearing sullen.

He sighs.

"Alright, alright... maybe I know a guy. He owes me a favor." El straightens up in the kitchen chair, her dark brown eyes widening. "It's a *maybe*. I know you don't like looking the thing. I'm not fond of looking at it either," Hopper admits, squeezing her fingers, as if he's trying to console her. "But if getting another tattoo to cover it doesn't work out... you gotta be patient about this, kid."

"*Compromise*," she says knowingly, nodding.

"That's right. Halfway happy, and everything with it."

His bigger, warm fingers slip out of hers. Hopper isn't dressed in his sheriff's uniform, but the look he gives her spells out authority. *A-U-T-H-O-R-I-T-Y*, El repeats to herself.

"Where's your switchblade?" he then questions, raising an eyebrow when El suddenly crosses her arms defiantly and goes quiet, leaning backwards and tilting her head up towards the ceiling. "El..." Hopper says very slowly. When she doesn't acknowledge him, he frowns.

"*Jane L. Hopper...*"

A faint pout appears on her mouth. "Under the mattress," she whispers, meeting his eyes.

Hopper nods. "Go grab it. Please."

The kitchen table rattles upon on bodily impact, when El jumps up and trudges to her bedroom.

It's a sunny Saturday morning but already there's a bunch of grey clouds hovering over her. It's not that El wants to hurt herself again... it's just not *fair* that he has to take something that belongs to her. But, she walks into the kitchen, reluctantly handing the switchblade over.

Hopper flicks it open, examining the blade with skepticism, before closing it and motioning to her with it. "Can you promise me... you

won't do something like that to yourself ever again?"

El nods, her confusion intensifying when he tosses the switchblade right into her hands.

"Eat your PB&J, then we'll go fix your new bike."

A stirring of hope erupts in her chest.

"You'll... teach me to ride it?" El dares to lose herself to that blinding sense of longing when Hopper smiles close-lipped through his beard.

"*Eat*," he repeats, much lower, calmer this time.

As much as she loves the taste of her sandwich, El forces herself to consume it as quickly as humanly possible without choking, patting off her hands and racing for the front door.

She falls at least twice during the lesson, but determinedly rises to her feet. El wipes the dirt and grass off her palms and kneecaps.

It's worth riding the driveway on her own, kicking out her feet in celebration, listening to him clapping and whistling her on.

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El's wound heals over time, with bumpy pink scarring that still feels tender when pressed.

"Now, listen, we're gonna have to do a little bit of lying with this guy..." Hopper says, climbing out of Jonathan's car he borrowed to drive them out of Hawkins. They parked along a dirt road, next to a field of high, prairie grass capping a hill. "We can't let him know where you're actually from. It'll raise more questions than answers, and it'll put us at risk. Understand?"

El's fingertips trace lightly over her scarring. "Sometimes lying is okay... to protect yourself?"

"*Sometimes*, yes," he replies, leading the way. She hurries towards the hill, catching up to Hopper. "But only lying to other people, not each other," Hopper adds.

El nods, smashing her lips together in consideration. "You're a bad liar," she declares, beginning to smile. He stops in the middle of the sun-drenched prairie grass, looking over his shoulder, giving her a playfully offended stare.

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah."

There's a joyous, undeniable light in Hopper's eyes when he grabs El, picking her up into his arms and twirling her in circles until she dissolves into high-pitched shrieks and giggles.

That surge of happiness deflates when she spots a man approaching them, carrying a rifle.

He's not much taller than Hopper, thinner and gaunt, his pale arms covered in inked patterns. El narrows her eyes at him, but doesn't summon her telekinetic abilities. Hopper glances around, startled for a moment.

"Aren't you two cute as a button?" the man says irritably, his voice thick and raspy.

"Hey, Maurice," Hopper greets him, lacking enthusiasm as well. "Thanks for letting us come out here on short notice. Means a lot."

They shake hands. El keeps her gaze pointedly on the rifle clutched in Maurice's left hand.

"Didn't think I would ever hear from the likes of you again, Slim," Maurice announces, exposing his teeth in a half-smile, half-grimace. They're whiter than his eyes, yellowing and bloodshot.

"Yeah, well, turns out I'd use that favor after all."

Hopper touches El's shoulder, dragging her attention back to the conversation. "Maurice, this is my daughter Jane," he says fondly.

El reaches to shake his hand as well, surprising the other man with her politeness and the firmness of her grip.

"Nice to meet you, Janey girl," Maurice says, chuckling aloud.

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El waits on a folding chair, absently picking at a stray thread on her lavender, checkered button-up, glancing around at the drawings pinned up.

They're *pretty* — symbols and animals of every shape and size, letters, numbers and flowers.

Maurice's underground workshop has waterstains on the floor and on the sides of the concrete walls. It smells metallic and... *heavy*.

"I thought you mighta been pulling my leg about this, but..." Maurice scratches his balding spot, appearing to be in complete disbelief. "Whoever did this to her is one *sick* son of a bitch. What the hell happened?"

From the other room, El clearly hears Hopper mumble. "Look, I'm not gonna get into it. This is sensitive stuff with her. The adoption agency said she's been through the mill. They, uh, put her in a workhouse at an early age and slapped a number on her like she was livestock."

"*Jesus...*"

"That's why we wanna keep this short and sweet. I'm trying to give her a fresh start."

"No problem," Maurice agrees, stepping back into the workshop, wiping off his hands with a rag. "Anything for you and yours, Slim."

Hopper sighs, grumbling.

"*Would you stop calling me that...*"

"You know what you want, Janey girl?" Maurice asks down on her, preparing his equipment.

El doesn't blink, furrowing her eyebrows.

"... A butterfly," she murmurs.

"Well, alright. That'll be nice and pretty for ya."

It seems like for now there's no more lying. Hopper nods to her, sitting down in a folding chair right next to her. El nervously jumps in her chair when a blaring, grinding sound comes out of Maurice's equipment, as it switches on.

"No more moving around, alright? You gotta keep your butt firmly planted, or it'll get messed up," Maurice scolds her, tugging on latex gloves.

El's heart quickens, her breathing going harsh and panicky when he holds up the buzzing machine needle, full of gears and dark ink. She holds herself still as can be, when Maurice grips onto her wrist to the stainless steel table.

She doesn't remember getting **011** — El doesn't remember anything about it. Only that she's had it as long as she can remember.

The needle *hurts*, feeling worse, like it's trying to poke under her skin and just keeps going. El's teeth sink into her lower lip.

She whimpers for a moment, hating how her eyes moisten.

"Kid, hey, look at me," Hopper says lowly, clasping her empty hand and rubbing it gently. It only makes her eyes forcefully squeeze shut, tears clinging to her eyelashes. "It's okay..."

El breathes out, reopening her eyes and staring at Hopper who grins, shifting their hands together.

"Did I ever tell you how I took Sara to get her ears pierced?"

Sara.

Hopper's daughter, who was... gone. Not gone like Momma, El thinks, but *gone forever*.

"She was only a baby, but Diane was so excited about it. I couldn't talk her out of it," Hopper explains softly, his facial features tightening. "I was so worried and scared for her. She was so little and I knew it was gonna hurt."

"What happened?" El asks, trying to focus on him instead of the *buzzing* and the needle.

"She was fine," he admits, laughing. "She barely made a damn fuss. It turns out I was the one who needed a good cry about it."

El laughs too, beaming.

"Or... how about the time I broke my ankle while riding my bike down a mountain?"

He tells her stories for a while, becoming animated and waving their interlocked hands up for emphasis. El loses notice of the pain.

"You're all done," Maurice tells her, wiping off the inky residue from her swollen, pink wrist. "You're gonna keep that clean. Don't touch it and don't pick at the scabs, you hear?"

"Good to know," Hopper comments, lifting El onto her feet. "Scoot, kid. It's my turn."

What?

"What are you doing...?" El asks, bewildered when Hopper steals her chair, laying out his own right wrist to the stainless steel work-table.

Hopper's grin widens impossible big.

"Did you really think I was gonna let you get a tattoo all by yourself?" Hopper *pffts*, rolling up his shirt-sleeve. "Come on—we can be the cool family with matching tattoos. How neat is that?"

It's *indescribable* what sweeps over El, making her hug him fiercely. He hugs her back gladly, dragging a hand through her curls.

"Whoa, ha. Okay. You better hold my hand for this, kid. I'm a little nervous."

She does, listening to him and Maurice go on about the beauty that was Chrissy Carpenter, and how they smoked weed in the back of Hopper's truck after the school football games, and all the things Hopper said she *better not do or you'll be grounded from TV until you're*

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Two weeks pass. El's tattoo mostly heals, gleaming black and shiny against her wrist.

She lies in her bed, surrounded by fluffy, warm pillows and the sheer, tulle curtains that billow out when the AC runs. Light sheds in through her window beside her, casting an opal glow high above, jewelizing the colorful stain-glass.

El holds her arm up, gazing over the butterfly. It's not hyper realistic or vibrant; it doesn't look like it could take wing any second.

That doesn't matter to her. She wanted a butterfly to remind her of Kali. Kali and her magic. To remind El of the love she shares for her *sister*, and the freedom they have achieved. But, Hopper has the same tattoo. Maybe it's just about family now. El's family, and only the people she truly considers *hers*.

"Home," El whispers resolutely.

She hugs her arm to herself and sucks in a trembling, loud breath.

"Hey, El? Can I come in?" Mike calls out from the doorway, knocking his fist.

"Yes," El answers, brushing a knuckle under her eye as he joins her.

"Hi, Mike."

He sits down next to her, legs dangling off the mattress. "Can I see it?" Mike asks, eagerly glimpsing her tattoo. "Wow... does it hurt?"

"Not anymore."

Mike's thumbnail drags over her bare, opened palm, sending little, pleasant tingles down it.

There's a hint of soap and spice on him when he leans in.

El takes her opportunity, cupping the side of his face and kissing him softly, pressing her lips to the corner of his mouth.

He looks down on her with dark, big eyes, and she'll never get tired of that. How Mike looks at her like it's their newest beginning, like he's relearning her and can't help being *amazed*.

Mike's lips part.

"*El...*"

It's so breathless and quiet. El doesn't say anything, stealing him back, kissing him harder and placing a hand on the back of Mike's head.

She's not exactly used to kissing anyone yet, but Mike makes it feel so easy. He's... safe.

He's *always* been.

El goes upright, pushing her forehead into his, her lips slightly brushing his. "It was worth it," she whispers understandingly. El's hand slips from his hair, touching to Mike's cheek. "Waiting. 353 days."

Mike's smile quivers. "I'm never letting you go again, I promise," he mumbles, shaking his head determinedly. "Whatever happens... .."

"... We go together, Mike," El finishes softly.

Their peace breaks when someone clears their throat. Hopper offers a meaningful look, holding back a laugh when El frowns in his direction.

"Not to interrupt, but we got company," he informs them. "Everyone's outside. Let's go."

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The summer air cools and lightens, as the last gold-tinted rays of sunlight bleed away. El's friends gather around her on the lawn, taking turns examining her new butterfly tattoo.

"*Holy shit, dude!*" Dustin gawks.

Lucas beams. "You're even *more* badass!" he exclaims. Max nods, smiling and hugging at El.

"I like it," Will tells her, accepting a hug too.

While Hopper switches off the gas grill and flips the burgers onto a plate, Joyce nudges him with an elbow. "Let me see it," she says curiously.

He tuts.

"Here? In *public*?"

Joyce huffs, slapping Hopper's arm when she sees the shit-eating grin.

"Oh, don't be such a—!"

Quickly, he rolls up his sleeve, exposing his wrist. Joyce nods in approval. "Very nice, Hops."

"Thanks, it hurt like a bitch."

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Everything outside darkens, except for the tiny, yellow lights floating lazily in the air.

"Just like that," Hopper encourages her, guiding El's hands to trap a firefly into her mason jar. She places her palm over the top, witnessing it's luminescence pulse and flutter. "And that's it."

"We let it go, right?" she asks, feeling concerned suddenly for the poor little bug.

He nods. "Anytime you're ready, kid."

El's palm lifts away, and for a second, she wonders if the firefly knows it's free. It's hard to know you are safe when you're *scared*, she thinks, relieved when the bug hovers away.

But eventually, you'll feel safe again.

One day.

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Author's Note:

YALL WANTED A SEQUEL TO "SOMEONE TO TURN TO" AND HERE WE GO. It's a semi-sequel? You can read this just on it's own but it'll be more fun and makes more sense if you read the first fic! I'm overly emotional about El and Hopper being a big happy family so this was what I had. Also I got multiple requests to do a little more and my pal Rose (sapphic-spook on Tumblr) also had a freebie writing request, so this is also dedicated to her. Thanks for reading and please leave me comments/thoughts! Say hi if you read "Someone To Turn To" before getting here! I would love to know who did.